

President Johnson's conversation with Robert McNamara*April 30, 1964***Operator:** Secretary McNamara on 9-0.**President Johnson:** Bob.**Robert McNamara:** Yes, Mr. President**LBJ:** I hate to bother you but--**RMC:** No trouble at all-**LBJ:** --tell me, I saw a little glimmer of hope on Vietnam in some, uh, paper today, where we'd routed some and killed a few and run 'em out or something. Do you have any--are you getting good cables on them at all?**RMC:** Well, I read that article, Mr. President, the, the uh-**LBJ:** [aside] Give me another one of those.**RMC:** The official battle report wasn't as good as the newspaper report, for once. We got a little, we got a break in the press.**LBJ:** Has Carl Rowan getting any of his propaganda people out there now?**RMC:** Yes, I think so and I'm going to check again before I go the end of the week and uh, tell him that I want to talk to Lodge about that while I am there. I'm just sitting here, as a matter of fact now, writing a cable to Lodge that I'll send Monday; telling him if he agrees, I'd like to stop by on my way home and I will cover that subject with him and be sure before I leave that Rowan's people are actually are on the way.**LBJ:** Have we got anybody that's got a military mind that can give us some military plans for winning that war?**RMC:** Well, Buzz Wheeler is going out with me.**LBJ:** I know but he went out last time and he just came back with, with planes, that's all he had in mind, wasn't it?**RMC:** Well we, uh, yes, well he had more than that but he emphasized the planes. And the planes, Max Taylor agrees, are not the answer to the problem. Whether we should have more

planes or not is another question, but it's not going to make any difference in the short run, that's certain.

LBJ: Let's get some more of something, my friend, because I'm gonna have a heart attack if you don't get me something. I'm just sitting here every day and uh, this war that I'm winning and I'm not doing much about fightin' it, and uh I'm not doing much about winnin' it, and I just read about it . And uh-- Let's get somebody that wants to do something besides drop a bomb, but that can go in and take in after these damn fellas and run them back where they belong. It looks like-

RMC: Looks like we want to tell Kahn-

[Part of recording erased for national security reasons, by the National Archive]

LBJ: And we need-shoot that guy --we need somebody over there that can give us better plans than we've got, because what we've got is what we've had since '54. We're not getting it done. We're, we're losing, so we need something new. It's uh, if you pitch this ol' southpaw every day and you wind up as the Washington Senators and you lose, well uh we'd better go us get us a new pitcher.

RMC: I know it-

LBJ: Let's find one. And tell those damn old generals over there to find one for ya, or you gonna go out there yourself.--

RMC: Well that's one reason I want to go back, and kick them in the tail a little bit.

[Part of recording erased for national security reasons, by the National Archive]

LBJ:

RMC: ...damn good marine coming along behind this one, and he wasn't ready for it this time. He's a little tiny guy, but he's out in the Pacific at the moment

LBJ: Well, what I want is somebody to lay up some plans to trap these guys and whoop the hell out of 'em. Kill some of 'em. That's what I want to do. If this Army Chief of Staff is not going to do it, let's get somebody else that'll do it.

RMC: I'll try and bring something back that will meet that objective.

LBJ: OK, Bob.

RMC: Thank you.

The President Discusses the War with McGeorge Bundy

May 20, 1964

President Johnson: Uh, we just can't have pure Americans going in and doing all the fighting.

McGeorge Bundy: You can't. You can't.

LBJ: Gotta have some Vietnamese to go with 'em. But I kinda had the impression that we hadn't been as active in the guerrilla warfare on the ground as we were in the air.

MB: I think this is right, Mr. President. I don't think we do have enough people with a guerrilla and counter-guerrilla mentality in that process. And that means Special Forces. That means really saying to Westmoreland very loud and very clear that that's the kind of war it is - not napalm from the air, but being in there stiffening the troops.

President Johnson's conversation with Senator Richard Russell

May 27, 1964. 10:55 a.m.

Richard Russell: Pretty good. How are you Mr. President?

President Johnson: Oh, I'm - got lots of troubles. I want to see what you -

RR: Well, we all have those -

LBJ: What do you think about this Vietnam thing? I'd like to hear you talk a little bit.

RR: Frankly, Mr. President, if you were to tell me that I was authorized to settle it as I saw fit, I would respectfully decline and not take it. It's uh - the damn worst mess I ever saw and I don't like to brag, I never have been right many times in my life, but I knew we were going to get into this sort of mess when we went in there. And I don't see how we're ever going to get out of it without fighting a major war with the Chinese and all of them down there in those rice paddies and jungles. I just don't see it. I just don't know what to do.

LBJ: Well, that's the way that I've been feeling for 6 months

RR: It appears that our position is deteriorating and it looks like the more that we try to do for them, the less that they're willing to do themselves. It's just a sad situation. There's no sense of responsibility there on the part of the leaders. It's all just through generations or even centuries, they've just thought about the individual and glorified the individual; and that's the only utilization of power is just to glorify the individual and not to save the state--or to try to help other people. And they just can't shed themselves of that complex. It's a helluva situation. It's a

mess. And it's going to get worse. And I don't know how what to do, if-- I don't think that the American people are quite ready for us to send our troops in there to do the fighting. If it came down to a option of just sending the Americans in there to do the fighting-- which we'll eventually end in a ground war, and a conventional war, and we'd do them a favor every time we killed a coolee. And when one of our people got killed it would be a loss to us. And if it got down to that, of just pulling out, I'd get out. But then I don't know. But, because undoubtedly some middle ground somewhere and if I were to get out--I'd get the same crowd that got rid of Diem to get in there, and tell them they wished the hell that we would get out. Then that would give us a good excuse for getting out. I see no terminal date or anything

LBJ: How important is that to us?

RR: It isn't important a damn bit. But all of this new missile stuff.

LBJ: Well, I guess that it's important to us from-

RR: Well, yes from the psychological standpoint -

LBJ: Well, yes from the standpoint that we're party to a treaty, and if we don't pay any attention to this treaty I don't guess they'll think we're going to pay any attention to any of them.

RR: Yeah, but we're the only ones that are paying attention to it.

LBJ: Yeah, I think that's right.

RR: You see other people are just as bound to that treaty as we are-

LBJ: Well, just because everybody else-

RR: I think that there are 12 or 14 other countries-

LBJ: That's right, there are 14.

RR: Don't know much about foreign policy, but it seems to me that there were several of them-

LBJ: There are 14.

RR: --parties to it. And other than questioning our word, and saving face that's the reason that I said that I don't think anybody would question us for not staying in there. Some old freebooter down in there, I've forgotten his name, I haven't heard about him lately, but he's still there, sort of a hell raiser. And he don't know exactly what he wants, but I think he's the most dangerous thing to the present regime; and I think that if he were to take over, he'd ask us to get out. And of course, if he did, I wouldn't doubt our theory of standing by the determination of the people. I

don't think--see how we can say that we're not going to go. If he's in charge of the government. The thing that's going to be a headache to anybody that tries to fool with it. Now you've got all the brains in the country, Mr. President, you better get a hold of them. I don't know what to do about this. I saw it all coming on, but that don't do any good now. That's water over the dam and under the bridge. And we're there and-

LBJ: Well, you've got-

RR: And McNamara over there, he's, he was up here yesterday testifying before the Committee, I didn't want to have him up here, but Mr. Howard Cannon and some of them wanting to have him up here. So I sat up here at 8:30, before I started these Appropriation Hearings and he's got rather-- he's been kicked around so that I'm not sure that he's objective as he ought to be, in surveying the conditions out there. He's like he's sort of like the -that it goes up to him personally and see that the thing goes through -- he's a can-do fellow, but I'm not too sure that he understand the history and background of those people out there, as fully as he should. But even from his picture, the damn thing ain't getting any better. And it's getting worse and you're putting more and more in there. And it's taking more and more people to help than we can give them. I don't know sir-- you better get some brains from somewhere to line up this thing. Because I don't know what to do with it.

LBJ: Well I spend all my days with Rusk and McNamara and Bundy and Harriman and Vance and all those folks that are dealing with it and I would say that it pretty well adds up to them now, that we've got to show some power and some force. And that they do not believe, they kinda like MacArthur in Korea, they don't believe that the Chinese Communists will come into this thing, but they don't know and nobody can really be sure; but their feeling is that they won't. And, in any event, that we haven't got much choice, that we are treaty-bound, that we're there, that this will be a domino that will kick off a whole list of others, and that we've just got to prepare for the worst. Now, I have avoided that for a few days and I don't think that the American people are for it. I don't agree with Morse and all he says but--

RR: No, neither do I, but -

LBJ: It doesn't look to me -

RR: He's voicing the sentiment of a hell of a lot of people.

LBJ: I'm afraid that's right; I'm afraid that's right. I don't think the people of the country know much about Vietnam and I think they care a hell of a lot less.

RR: Yeah, I know, but you go to sending a whole lot of our boys out there --

LBJ: Yeah, that's right - that's exactly right. That's what I'm talking about -You got a few, we had 35 killed--

RR: More than that have been killed in Atlanta Georgia in automobile accidents.

LBJ: Yeah, maybe 83 went down in a crash in a 707, but one day, that doesn't make any difference

RR: That's the way these folks understand, they don't understand anything over there

LBJ: The Republicans are going to make a political issue out of it everyone of them, even Dirksen

RR: It's the only issue that they've got.

LBJ: I talked to Dirksen the other day Friday and he suggested that I have 3 of Armed Services and 3 from Appropriations and 3 from Foreign Relations-- all from Foreign Relations. And I invited them. And yesterday before they came, he gave out a big statement that we had to get us a program and go out after them. And Haganlooper came over and said that we just had to stand and show our force and put our men in there and let come what may come and nobody disagreed with him. And Mansfield, just he just wants to pull up and get out; and Morris wants to get out; and Greening wants to get out and that's about where it stops. I don't know.

RR: And there's others, but haven't said much about it. But Frank Church has told me 2 or 3 times, that he didn't want to make a speech on it, but he just wants to get out of there. I don't know whether he's told you that or not. He just wishes to God that we would get out of there

LBJ: No, I haven't talked to him.

RR: Well, I just used that as an illustration, cause he's mentioned that to me more than once.

LBJ: Who are the best people that we have, that you know of to talk about this thing? I don't want to do anything on the basis on just the information that I've got now.

RR: I don't know, Mr. President.

LBJ: I've talked to Eisenhower a little bit

RR: I think. I think that the people that you have named, have all formed a hard opinion on it. . I think --

LBJ: No, Rusk has tried to pull back, he's tried to hold back on everything. But he's about to come to the conclusion now, that Vietnam is wobbly. And Laos is crumbling.

RR: Laos, Laos. Hell it ain't worth a damn. They've been talking about all these battles down

there; and I tried to get the best information that I could--from CIA and from Defense both. On all the BS fighting on the plains of --and the highest casualty is 150. That Laotian thing is absolutely impossible then. It's a whole lot worse than Vietnam. There are some of these Vietnamese-- after they beat them over the head-- they will go in there and fight. But Laos is an impossible situation. It's just a rathole. I don't know-- if before I took any drastic action, I think that I would get somebody like old Omar Bradley and one or two, perhaps -senior people that have had government experience--not necessarily military. If he wasn't scared to death of McNamara, this fellow Adams, who is head of Strike -its top flight man--that I would send out there with them. Then let them go out there and fool around and smell the air, and get the atmosphere, and then come back here and tell you what they think. Cause they, they, they are new in it and would not have a many great preconceived ideas in approaching it.

LBJ: Now, one of our big problems, the biggest, this is between us, and I don't want this repeated to anybody, is Lodge--

RR: I know it.

LBJ: He ain't worth a damn.

RR: Why, of course.

LBJ: And he can't work with anybody. He won't let anybody else work. He -- we get the best USIA man to put on the all radios and try to get them to be loyal to the government, and to be fighting and quit deserting-

RR: He improvised that, didn't he?

LBJ: And he calls in USIA, and says 'I handle the newspapers and magazines, radio myself, so to hell with you.' So that knocks that guy out. So then we send out the best CIA man that we've got, and he said, 'I handle the intelligence, to hell with you.' Then he wants a new Deputy Chief of Mission, so we get him to give us names, and we pick one of those, the beat that we've got-- send him out to run the damn war, and he gets to where he won't speak to Deputy Chief of Mission. Then we get General Harkins out there, we thought that he was a pretty good man, and then he can't work with him. So then we send Westmoreland out, and it's just a helluva mess. You can't do anything with Lodge and that's where McNamara gets so frustrated. They go out and get agreements and issues his orders, and sends his stuff in there, and then Lodge just takes charge of it himself and he's not a take-charge man and it gets stacked up there.

RR: He never has followed anything through to conclusion, since I've known him, and I've I him for 20 odd years. He never has. I went out with him in '43 around the world, we were the only committee that went out during the war. And we went over there, and he's a bright fellow, intelligent fellow. But he's just not a man that persists, and he thinks that he's dealing with barbarian tribes out there, and that he's the emperor and he's going to tell them what to do. And

there's no doubt that, in my mind, that he had old Dean killed out there, him, so he could-

LBJ: That was a tragic mistake-

RR: Oh, it was awful-

LBJ: And we've lost every-

RR: You've got to get someone with-- more pliant than Lodge to do what he does right quick. He's living up on cloud nine. It's a bad mistake-- I don't know --probably the best thing that you could do would be to ask Lodge, doesn't he think that it's about time that he comes home.

LBJ: Well, he'd be back home campaigning against us, on this issue every day.

RR: Well, God almighty, he's going to come back --and when the time comes, I'd give him reasons for doing it. He's going to come back. If you bring him back now everybody's going to say, 'Hell, he's coming back because Johnson removed him from out there.' MacArthur, with all his power, couldn't hurt Truman because everybody would have said, 'Well, hell, he's just mad because he got removed.' So maybe it would be better to sympathize with him in it. And you needn't worry. Lodge will be in here in my judgment; he'll be on their ticket in some way. I don't think that they'll nominate him for President but they probably will for Vice President. But whether they do or don't, he'll be here campaigning before that campaign's over. I don't know it maybe I better take that back, things are so hopeless for Republicans and he certainly has got enough political sense to know that and not get his head chopped off. It would be foolish.

LBJ: Has Clay got any judgment on a thing like this?

RR: Yeah, he has, even though, he's inclined to.

LBJ: He's off in another area of the world, mostly isn't he?

RR: I think Clay has--he knows. I'd take his judgment on most anything, if he'd separate himself from his predilections and he doesn't have any out there in that part of the world. He's-- I think people generally, have a good deal of respect for Clay's judgment and there am a great deal of affection and respect for old man Bradley. He's not in his dotage yet. I had him up here the other day getting some advice on some matters, and I found him very alert. And he's so humble, I just don't know, he's could just be a doormat for Lodge out there. But he's an intelligent man-- now Clay wouldn't. He'd stand up to anybody, if he felt that he had any support in higher places. I just don't know. It's a tragic situation. It's just one of those places where you can't win. Anything that you do is wrong.

LBJ: Well, think about it and call me.

RR: All right, sir but I have thought about it and worried about it and prayed about it-

LBJ: I don't believe that we can do anything, that-

RR: I have, religiously. It frightens me, cause it's my country that is involved over there, and if we get into this, on any particular scale, there's no doubt in my mind but that the Chinese will be in there. And then we'll be fighting a damn conventional war against our secondary potential threat, and it'll be a Korea on a much bigger scale. And a worse scale because the peculiar physical configuration of Korea made extensive guerilla fighting over there virtually impossible. If you go from Laos and Cambodia and Vietnam and bring North Vietnam into it too, why it's the damndest place on earth and the French report that they lost 250, 000 and spent a couple of billion of theirs down there and a billion of ours. And just got the hell whipped out of them, and they had the best troops that they had. In fact, they had a division of crack German troopers and they were starving--

LBJ: You don't have any doubt that if we go in there, and get them up against a wall, the Chinese Communist is going to come in?

RR: No doubt at all.

LBJ: That's my judgment, and my people don't think so.

RR: There's no doubt in my mind about it, you'll find Chinese volunteers in there-- as soon--very shortly after we have active combat unit engaged.

LBJ: Now Mac writes me a memo and all he says that we continue support to Vietnam and that's number one; and end to the reflex of pique and face-saving at every essay of DeGaulle. Well, we're not piqued, we just asked DeGaulle to give us a blue print, and he doesn't have it. He just says neutralization. But there again, nobody that wants to agree to neutralization. And we asked him, 'Who would agree to go?' We said, 'We're ready.' And he just says, 'Well, we have to continue to maintain our strength, and get in a position.' But he's got no blue print. Realistic facing of the fact that we are in this situation without reliable military allies. Well, hell, I know that. Four - an exploration of the possibilities of the United Nations or some other arrangements. Well?

RR: Whose, whose is that?

LBJ: This is Mike Mansfield's thing and they won't do a damn thing, even on the Cambodia border. Hell, we can't get a majority vote in the Security Council. 'Our willingness to entertain any reasonable proposals for national conferences.' Well we are ready to confer with anybody anytime, but hell, a conference ain't going to do any good. They're not going to take back and give us territory and behave. We tell them every week--and we tell Khrushchev; we send China and Hanoi --and all of them --every week that we would get out of there and stay out of there if

they would quit raiding their neighbors and they just say screw you.

RR: That's right.

LBJ: So the conferences won't do it. Now the whole question as I see it is do we--is it more dangerous for us to let things go as they are going now, deteriorating every day--and I -

RR: I don't think that we can let things go, Mr. President.

LBJ: Then it would be for us to move in-

RR: Well, we've got to either move in or move out. I-

LBJ: That's just about what it is

RR: You can make a tremendous case for moving out, but not for--

LBJ: Well, now Nixon and Rockefeller?

RR: But it would be more consistent with their attitude--the American people and their general reactions--to go in-- they could understand that. But getting out, even after we go in, but getting bogged down with the war with China. That would be a hell a mess, worse than the one now. To some extent. And that's what makes it so difficult; and don't forget that old Ben Miles' went over there and got killed. Old Ben was a great hero, but he got killed.

LBJ: That's right.

RR: And the old man was killed and so, if they start off with that, then they'll get out and then be killed. It's just a helluva come off. I just don't know how much Russia? they just want to cause us a trouble they can, but if there's any truth in their theory, that they are really at odds with China. There really is a cleavage there?

LBJ: They are, but they'd go with them as soon as the fight started. They wouldn't forsake the Communist Chinese-

RR: I'm not talking about that. We might get them to take an active part --in getting those things straightened out.

LBJ: We're doing all we can on that, but she doesn't show any signs of contributing.

RR: Well, they'd be foolish to, from one extent-- we'd just continue to pour money in there and get nothing out of it. We don't even get good will out of it. I just don't know; and I don't know where to go for advice. I just don't know. McNamara is the smartest fellow that any of us know,

but he's got so damn--he is opinionated as hell, and he's made up his mind on this-

LBJ: Well, I tell you, Dick, what he's done. I think that he's a pretty flexible fellow. He's gone out there and he's got Kahn to agree that we cannot launch a counter-offensive or hit the North until he gets more stabilized or better set in the South; and he thought that he was buying us time, and that we could get by until November. But these politicians started raising hell, and Scripps Howard is writing these stories. All of the Senators, and Nixon and Rockefeller and Goldwater all saying that let's move and go into the North

RR: That was a devastating piece that Lucas had; but they're just little papers-

LBJ: That's right

RR: And they don't cover much of the country, but if it got out, it would raise a lot of hell.

LBJ: That's right. And they can always get an isolated example of things that McNamara has said, that's not generally true, they they've got too damn many people get killed, every day. And that they are flying the sorties and that they get some results and they're killing thousands of their people but we're losing more. I mean we're losing ground. And he was hoping that we could avoid moving into the North, and thereby provoking the Chinese. Hell, there ain't any way.

RR: Hell, you know that we tried that, from infiltration, guerilla-war standpoint, with disastrous results.

LBJ: Lodge. Nixon, Rockefeller, Goldwater all say move. Eisenhower-

RR: Bombing, and killing women and children-

LBJ: No, they say pick out an oil plant or pick out a refinery. Or something like that. Take selected targets; watch the trails they're coming out of and try to bomb them out of them.

RR: Oh, hell, it ain't worth a hoot. That's just impossible -

LBJ: McNamara said that yesterday that in Korea, LeMay and all of them was going to try and stop all of those tanks. There were 90 of them, and they let all the Air Force on them, and they got one and 89 came on through.

RR: We tried it in Korea, we even got out a lot of old B-29s to increase the bomb load and we just dropped millions and millions of pounds of bombs-- day and night-- we'd knock out the road at night and in the morning -the damn people would be driving all over it. It was true on that railroad over on the north coast--we used the Navy and good 14-inch rifles and knocked down a mountain on it. Shelled it and knocked down these mountains down. And covered the railroad tracks and everybody said, by God, we've got them now and the next morning, the trains were

running like the devil right over the tracks. We shot up several million worth of shells thinking that we had got it. We never could actually interdict the lines of communication, although we had absolute control of the sea and the air and we never stop them. And you ain't going to stop these people either.

LBJ: Well, they'd impeach a President that would run out, wouldn't they? I just don't believe that outside of Morse, everybody that I talked to--including Hickenlooper-- including all the Republicans. None of them disagreed with him yesterday when he made the statement that we had to stand. And I don't know how in the hell you're going to get out unless they tell you to get out. We -

RR: We had our man over there running the government that told us to get out we could -

LBJ: That's right, but I don't know how you'd do that -

RR: I don't know if we could get somebody else I can't remember that fellow's name, some sort of a maverick fellow that's got a bit following in Saigon, and all our people all hate him, because he's always against the government. And he's not fighting them and all, but he's a very powerful man in Vietnam and everybody that takes over their government, and gives him the excuse of suppressions. And if he was to get in and say 'You damn Yankees get of here, I'm running this government now.'

LBJ: Well, wouldn't that pretty well fix us though in the eyes of the world? And make us look mighty bad?

RR: Well, I don't know. We don't look too good right now. And of course, you'd look pretty good, I'd guess, going in there with all the troops, but I tell you it'll be the most expensive adventure that this country ever went into-

LBJ: I've got a little old sergeant that works for me over at the house and he got six children. And I just put him up as the United States Army, Air Force, and Navy every time I think about making this decision and think about sending that father of those six kids in there. And what the hell are we going to get out of his doing it? And it just makes the chills run up my back.

RR: It does me. I just can't see it -

LBJ: I just haven't got the nerve to do it, and I don't see any other way out.

RR: Isn't any sense to it. It's one of these things where "heads I win, tails you lose."

LBJ: Well, think about it and I'll talk to you again. I hate to bother you, but I -

RR: I wish I could help you. God knows I do 'cause it's a terrific quandary that we're in over

there. We're just in the quicksands up to our very necks and I just don't know what the hell is the best way to do about it.

LBJ: I love you and I'll be calling you.

RR: I'll see you sir.

President Johnson with Secretary of State Dean Rusk

February 25, 1965, 10:25 a.m.

Dean Rusk: In thinking about this public information situation, I'm inclined now to have a press conference this afternoon around 4:30 to get our statement of our general position clear before the other kinds of news break later in the evening, and also then Bob McNamara can have his tomorrow morning.

President Johnson: I think that's good--

DR: And I'll bring over to you when I come to the cabinet meeting a little, uh...

LBJ: You might want to send George Ball to that, as I look over this agenda, I don't see anything that's -it's a lot of details on departmental administration, and I think if you could spend your time on this and talking to the United Nations people or any others you need, probably be a better use of your time than coming over there.

DR: I think I could use that time well to get ready for the press conference.

LBJ: I want to be very careful that we don't show that we are desperate and dramatic and we are changing our policy. All of TV now is trying to say that this is a great escalation, and that the B-57s yesterday are an entirely new policy. I've made clear to the people I've talked to--and McNamara heartily concurs. And I've talked to Bob Smith--that the congressional resolution, this is a time to close ranks, we want to be united. We asked the Congress in the light of the their stepped-up efforts to take some action, and the Congress took this action, and it says that we will reply to any attacks and we will deter any aggression and they approve our doing so!

DR: Right.

LBJ: Now, when we could deter it with helicopters, we did. When we could deter it with shots from the Vietnamese troops, we did. When we could prevent aggression with pathfinders and sending one of our planes in to lead their planes with their Air Force, we did. But as they stepped up, and as they mounted, and as they become more severe, and they tied down our Ranger Companies, we did not change our policy; we changed our equipment. Because they escalated, and they brought in the ships with all the guns, and they brought in a lot more people. The

infiltration increased, and they had their staging areas, and we had Ranger Companies tied down there, and it's going to cost hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese lives.

DR: Right.

LBJ: So, at the request of the South Vietnamese government, we busted 'em up and released those people and saved their lives. With the B-57s. Now, it is true that this is probably the first time that B-57s have been used in South Vietnam. But the Congress authorized us and directed us to prevent aggression. We have not changed our policy. That is our policy! That resolution is our policy. That is our authority. And until it's repealed-and the last paragraph says you can repeal it-but until it is repealed, that's the policy of this government, and we're within it. And it's pretty broad policy and so forth.

DR: Right.

LBJ: And that what they're going to try to put in our lap is-- that we're the warmongers, that we're changing our policy, that we've got a brand new policy from day to day, that we've really got no policy at all, that we're drifting, that we. So on and so forth. Now that's the commentators' line, I think this is the answer to it: I'd keep those 502 Congressmen right chained to me all the time with that resolution. And look at your statement, I got the resolution out of some form, some bulletin from the State Department. And right preceding it was a statement by the Secretary of State. And I believe right upon it was a statement by the President. Anyway, both statements at that time spelled out our policy, namely, keep our agreements. Which they have not done. They've abandoned all of theirs. Uh, namely help these people help themselves, which Eisenhower spelled out. Namely if they'll leave their neighbors alone, we'll come home tomorrow offering peace, we've repeated that time and time again, and I think you might say in your press conference that the President said in every State of the Union that he'd go anywhere, he'd do anything, he'd see anybody if it contributed to an agreement, or to an understanding, or to peace, but we've had understandings in '54 and we've had understandings in '62, and these understandings are not being kept. These agreements that have already been negotiated-it's not a question of negotiation, they've already been negotiated-there's being violated. And if any country--we welcome and applaud any country in the world that can do anything to get these agreements kept, that have already been negotiated. I think that's something you ought to give some thought to.

DR: All right, that's fine, I'll bring over to you just before or just after the cabinet meeting what I would suggest as an opening statement.

LBJ: Okay.

DR: All right. Bye. Thank you.

Johnson Advises Humphrey on Gaining Congressional Funding

May 4, 1965

Hubert Humphrey: Uh...Mike and I met with Morse and Ellender. All is well.

President Johnson: It will be right on up then.

HH: Here's the situation. If it comes up today, they can act in the House tomorrow, and we'll act on it on Thursday. We'll have a limitation debate of not more than five hours.

LBJ: Get Hayden to just start hearings as soon as McNamara gets through and then y'all act Thursday. That'll be good.

HH: That's fine sir.

LBJ: Wonderful job, That'll make a great President and a great emperor out of you if you'll just be here and do those things. That just shows you what you can do in 30 minutes. So, let's watch anybody else that might cause trouble. And we got to bear this in mind: to deny or to delay this request means you're not giving a man ammunition he needs for his gun. You're not giving him gas he needs for his helicopter. You got him standing out naked and letting people shoot at him. And we don't want to do that.

HH: Yessir.

LBJ: OK.

President Johnson with Senator Birch Bayh

June 15, 1965, 1:20 p.m.

LBJ: Hi Birch.

BB: Hi, Mr. President. How are you, sir? I had a rather lengthy discussion with Governor Brannigan. Remember some time ago when I was down there on another matter and we had a little conversation on the Vietnamese situation and you suggested at that time, that it might be helpful for some of us to speak out and to give some thought and ideas. Would it be helpful to have a midwestern governor join in this business? He's talked to both of our state university presidents and I've asked him to follow this up with Perdue and Indiana to see whether we can start a countervailing student movement-I didn't want to muddy the water in this, but I think Roget would go along

LBJ: I think it would be absolutely excellent, what we've got to--But what some of these folks

have done, we don't want to say it, because it makes it look like McCarthyism and we detest him so much--But what they have done, throughout the world, they are winning the propaganda war against us. And they are also winning the other war against us, because they are winning the propaganda one and we have to spend half of our time explaining what we are trying to do and so on and so forth.

They have got Harold Wilson on the ropes and they have the Prime Minister of Canada dodging and ducking. Now, none of us want to do what the Joint Chiefs of Staff say you ought to do to win --and that is to go in and bomb the hell out of them. I am holding them up and refusing to do that. On the other hand, if we walked out of there, we would bust every treaty we got and 44 nations would say the U. S. could not be depended upon for anything. Whether it's Tokyo or Berlin or any of the rest of them-- NATO, SEATO, CINTO. So we cannot walk out and we cannot walk in, so to speak, with heavy bombs and atomic weapons and stuff like that.

We are trying to deter them and wear them out, without losing a lot of people. Now we've lost 400, but we've lost 160,000 casualties since WWII: Korea, Greece, Iran, Turkey and all over the world. So 400 compared to 160,000 is not bad, relatively speaking. So if we cannot go in and we cannot go out - what can we do? We can't just sit there. The only pressure that we are putting on them, is bombing their bridges and their ammunition dumps. We have knocked out 20% of their ammunition and knocked out all their bridges and they can't have many more buildups, because we are killing a good many of their people.

This buildup that we have to face between now and the monsoon season, was built up before, we started our bombing in February. But I just held off as long, long, and long as I could because I knew the people would raise hell, I knew it did not look good and did not have a peace image and so on and so forth.

But it has done what we thought it ought to do, primarily three things: it has deterred them; it is hard as hell for them to get any more men down there, they have to load up a truck, they have to get their supplies, when they get to a bridge, the damn bridge is out. Then they've got to get a ferry, load the ferry, go around and unload their boat--their truck and it's too heavy and take it by pieces then they get on the other side and go another four miles and another bridge is out. That's the first thing. Then the second thing is we are requiring a hellava lot of people to be rebuilding these bridges, and as soon as they rebuild, we knock it out again. And their economy is having trouble keeping these things restored-- to try to get them in shape. We just let them get right up to where they're about to finish it and then we take them out again. The third thing is -is it's got them all scared to death-they stay in and hide and stay in their caves so therefore they cannot produce as much.

We're hoping to wear them down so much they'll agree to talk. Whereas before they'd just spit in our face. When we made a pause, and wouldn't do anything for a week, they'd just spit in our face. They wouldn't even open the letter telling them that. And they're arrogant as hell, and I don't blame them. I defeated Goldwater 15 million, but why would I want to give Goldwater half

my Cabinet? They're winning, why would they want to talk? If we give up something, they're going to win-

BB: After your conversation down there, I made a speech and every place I go in Indiana, I make sure that we tell the story; because I have found that the people are with you. The thing that gripes me and the thing that I think the governor can be helpful with is these so-called intellectuals-the people who are supposed to have all the brains-- are the people who are clear out in left field. And they just cannot conceive of what you have to do there.

LBJ: That's right. I said to them yesterday -- a group of intellectuals, 'What would you have me do, that I am not doing?' or 'What am I doing, that you would have me stop?' Well, Scotty Reston was one of them and Alistair Cooke of the Manchester Guardian was another one and several people, and they said 'Well, stop your bombing.'

I said all 'O.K., now you want a political solution. The only way you are going to get a political solution as contrast to a military solution is to have some pressure on them. Now the only pressure I've got is the bombing. I don't instigate any instances. We haven't even waked up and buried our dead and they're gone. So the only thing I'm doing is bombing. Now if you ask me to stop the bombing, what do I have? What pressure can I use or what do I have to offer them?' They agreed there was nothing, they said, 'I guess that's right, I guess you have to keep up the bombing, but we just don't like it.' I said, 'Well I don't like it either, I don't even like being out there.'

I asked, 'What else?' 'Well,' they said, 'maybe you oughta try getting some extra countries to give in some people, outside of the United Nations,' because they knew I had tried the UN last August and the United Nations said alright, they would talk about it while they were shooting at our ships out there in the Gulf of Tonkin. So they ordered the North Vietnamese to come in there to the Security Council and the Vietnamese said fuck you. That's exactly what they said, you have no jurisdiction, and we aren't about to.

So Greening gets up today and said we've got to go to the United Nations. Well we've got the UN -- we have asked them to take charge. We have submitted it to them but the other side just said screw you. China didn't belong to the United Nations; and the UN said they'd be willing to help. On the other countries, I told them we had 36 of them out there and I have sent Lodge, Ball and McNamara to see them all. Every country that has 100 troops, I have asked them to send them. I have 2,000 coming through the Philippines; I've got 20,000 coming out of Korea, 1,200 from Australian. But the British have 70,000 in Malaysia, they can't put any in, they're overtaxed now. The French won't, they got the hell whooped out of them. The Germans are putting in money, and we can't take any people out of Germany -because we've got five divisions there, protecting them. That's why we can't take too many out of Korea, because we've got two divisions there, protecting them. And it does do any good to rob Peter to pay Paul. 'Well that's right' but they didn't know that. Here's Scotty Reston, and Alistair Cooke.

So the answer to your question is 'yes' and I wish you would just take a lead in foreign policy. You do not have to be on the Committee. 85% of the people of this country are for what we are doing in the Dominican Republic and Vietnam and the polls show it. I just finished a poll in New York State. I ran 73% in New York in the November election; today I would defeat Rockefeller 89 to 11. Today I would defeat Romney 78 to 22; I would defeat Nixon 79 to 21. And I have beaten the Republicans more than they have ever been beaten before and 85% approve my position of these things. Five or six don't know, and eight or ten are against it, but they're the ones raising hell.

Now we read the Communist bulletins, there are orders to go out and do it. This Dubois youth thing, they're all over colleges, and they have a sit-in tomorrow. They're all let by the Communists; Hoover's got people after them all the time. But if I go out and talk about it it's always about McCarthy. Everybody disagrees with him about the Communists, but that's what they're doing. They're stirring everyone up. The Chinese have got their folks working; the Russians have their folks. This Russian Ambassador - hell -he's talking to all of our Senators and after he has lunch with one of our Senators, it takes me two weeks to get him not to think I am a warmonger.

BB: That is ridiculous. They are using us as propaganda against our own Senators and against us.

LBJ: Oh, yes, what they do, is they get one speech from Morse, they take it, print it and leak it. They then come back and say that the country is so divided. I see in here this morning, some article that 85% of the Senators in the U.S. Senate were really undercover against Johnson's position. I believe 85% of them are for it.

The alternatives are -- do I want to go in with LeMay and bomb Peking? If I do, I will get 35 or 40 divisions the next morning. I cannot do that. Do I want to get out like Morse? No. Do I want to just sit there and get hit like I did for several months? I do not think I should ask an American boy to get shot at and not shoot back. So then what do I do? Well, I tell them to defend themselves, and now they have to have more manpower. And we have to put men in there because they are not going to do anything except build up their forces a try to run us out during the monsoon season. And that is until Sept. 15th, so it is going to be real rough the next 90 days.

We hope that at the end of that period, we will wear them down some, but there is no assurance. They hope they can wear us out. And I really believe they will last longer than we do. One of their boys gets down in a rut and he stays there for two days, without water, food or anything. Never moves; waiting to ambushes somebody. Now an American, he stays down there about 20 minutes and goddamn he's got to get him a cigarette.

BB: Who could he talk to? I told him I did not think he oughta should say anything until I had a nice talk with McGeorge Bundy.

LBJ: He's excellent, if he's here. If not, somebody in his office, just tell them to get right on it.

Thank you my friend

BB: Thank you, sir. I will see you soon.

LBJ: Give your sweet wife my love.

BB: I will-

LBJ: I want to get with you sometime, go out on the boat-

BB: Alright. Thank you

LBJ Talks to Mike Mansfield

July 27, 1965

LBJ: My judgment is, and I'm no military man at all. But. . . if they get a hundred and fifty [Americans], they'll have to have another hundred and fifty. And then they'll have to have another hundred and fifty. So, the big question then is: What does the Congress want to do about it?...And I think I know what the country wants to do now. But I'm not sure that they want to do that six months from now.

President Johnson's notes on conversation with Secretary McNamara

June 21, 1965

Robert McNamara: Mr. President, two points. First I just received word the Senate Committee knocked out that Section 608 requiring we take capabilities to the Congress. They voted 10 to 3. Secondly, we did get distributed to all of the, uh, staff members and senior people associated with the Senate Armed Service Appropriations Committee the B-52 bomb damage assessment analysis this morning and got a special meeting with Mahon to de-brief by our defense intelligence agency people this afternoon.

President Johnson: That's good. Now I think that you ought to spend some time with your friend, Mr. Kennedy. I don't want this repeated to him but for your information I think you are the principle officer affected. I think that he is functioning in this Viet Nam field and Dominican field a little bit overtime, with he and some of his stooges very much against us. And I think his general feeling is that we should not have asked for the \$700 million appropriation and by asking for it-saying that we have construed it is as support of our position-that he wanted to demonstrate his independence and while he wouldn't vote against it, that he would make the speech that he did and as a consequence he's touching up Javits a little bit and different ones around.

Certain Senators tell me they talked to him in the Cloak Room and they hear little snide remarks about the situation. I think it could very appropriately be said that the Defense Department took the position that we were, were spending more than we had appropriated that we had ample authority under the existing law to transfer that money. That's what we planned to do. We told them that, we told them that if they wanted to we could have asked for the money now or transfer it and ask for it later! After explainin the pros and cons, all we wanted them to know was that we were digging into the account, it was going to be overdrawn, we'd have to come back, and be frank and candid with them, and Ford made the suggestion we ask for it now, an he thought that was the better way to do it and he had been fiscally responsible and worked with us in the House and Committee and we thought that given the opportunity if anybody wanted to, to debate it and discuss it and object to that, had a debate, New York Time's been advocating debates, so we sent it up there, and we don't object if what he said about it. But, uh, we do want him to know our reasons for doing it, and they were based upon an attempt to keep substantial support behind us in the Congress. Now each day, the New York Times, and I know he's conscious of it, and uh, they're going to be agitating in the-- Javits.

Bobby is going to be a great deal in the background because be operates a good deal that way -- but they are going to be asking for a new Congressional debate, and a new resolution of support. Tell him that we have been willing to ask for that and we don't think it would be wise, but that we have asked Fulbright if he thinks we ought to have a new resolution - - and we have asked Mansfield - and we have asked Dirksen and we have asked Russell. Now they are the men in this field in the Senate and you would like to ask him if he thinks a new resolution would be wise.

That is so much on that general feeling because that's in the columns and in the stories and the newspaper articles and so on and so forth, and of course when they talk to him they come running back and talk to us. I think there's another tack too. I think you ought to talk to him about the new pause that has been proposed. The New York Times proposes a pause - Mac has kind of had he feeling about a pause and understand he has talked to you about it - - now if we had any indication the pause would do any good, it would be fine. But we are afraid if we do pause -- we got hell knocked out of us while we did. I think the American people would be awfully critical of us."

RMC: No I don't think now is the time.

LBJ: Well I just think we ought to talk to him about it, because this is where most of our real trouble is coming from. It goes back, if you will remember, the real flare-up came on this statement, this \$700 million. And my intelligence people tell me that that is the backbone of it and since it's your \$700 million and since you heard the Ford thing and since you know we think it is all right for them to debate it -- we don't object to McGovern and Church and them if they want to say these things, say them! We don't agree with them, we don't think they help. But we have never asked one Senator not to speak and we haven't asked him.

And we'll put on a pause but say - what else he thinks ought to be done? I think that is a very

potentially dangerous to our general cause on Vietnam. I think that in time it is going to be like the Yale professor said, that it is going to be difficult for us to very long prosecute effectively a war that far away from home with the divisions we have here and part the potential divisions.

That's really had me concerned for a month and I am very depressed about it because I see no program from either Defense or State that gives me much hope of doing anything except just praying and gasping to hold on during monsoon and hope they will quit. I do not believe they ever going to quit, and

I don't see how we have any way of either a plan for a victory militarily or diplomatically. And I think that is something you and Dean have to sit down and try to see if there are any people that we have in those departments that can give us any program or plan or hope.

If not, we've got to see if you need to go out there or have somebody else go out there and take one good look at it and say to these new people 'now you have changed the government about the last time.' And this is it -- call the Buddhists and the Catholics and the General and everyone together and say 'we are going to do our best' and be sure they are willing to let new troops come in and be sure they are not going to resent 'em. If not, ya'll can run over us and have a government of your own choosing, but we just cannot take these changes all the time.

That is the Russell plan. Russell thinks we ought to take one of these changes to get out of there. I do not think we can get out of there with our treaty like it is, with all we have said, and I think it would just lose us face in the world and I shudder to think what all of them would say --

But if we're going to keep getting AP pictures out of there, stories out of there like they are, and if our best friends who are supposed to be allies of ours are going to take the position, they going to foment it.

Javits says 'We face a big question in this country in stepping up this activity especially moving ground troops and which is now rumored to be division strength to undertake on the ground in North Vietnam possibly what we are doing in the air. Any such plan by this Administration must be thoroughly explored by the Congress.' He said 'Johnson does not speak for himself, but operates instead through the White House and Pentagon spokesmen' and 'people are not being informed he says about the Vietnam situation.'

Javits and three other Republicans spoke on the radio and he said that any large scale U.S. troop commitment would require quote 'a new Congressional debate and a new Congressional resolution of support' unquote, our Pres. Johnson.

So I think that is something you had better devote some of your attentions to and I think you'd better also talk to your military people when you are talking to Wheeler say - - 'now can we, President wants some kind of a plan that gives us some hope for victory' and I guess he will go back to the bombings. And talk to Dean.

I cannot see anything that they do but just laugh at us. Now, Ho Chi Minh and Chou En Lai have made statements on this Wilson mission-- telling him to go to hell.

RMC: Yep, that is right. There is no indication they want to talk now, that is clear.

LBJ: And I think Wilson will just screw up things more when he comes over here. We have to let him. But he will come over here and go everywhere else but never get in there. I think that somehow or other, we ought to condition his coming over here on acceptance that they'll see him over there, don't you?

RMC: I doubt you could do that.

LBJ: Well couldn't we say to Bruce, 'Now we're very anxious to work on this thing, if you have any chance of seeing him at all. But if you don't, please don't go over there and make a big speech dividing our country.' I don't see any good in talking to us. We have told him we are for it.

RMC: I don't think you can keep him out of here, and I don't think I'd try. I think I would try it when he is here, is have him avoid saying anything to divide the country. I think we can accomplish that. But I don't think you can keep him out of here, and I think it would be a mistake to try.

LBJ: Well if he is not going to get in there, what will it served by his coming here? Why shouldn't his mission cable the respective capitols for appointments before he undertakes them? He's got a blank check from us. We are willing to negotiate. He does not have to come here to find out."

RMC: He will probably be accepted in Moscow and probably not in Hanoi and Peking. It would be awfully difficult, I think to say well you cannot come here unless you are doing to be accepted in Hanoi and Peking."

LBJ: Well I don't ever think that we can say 'You can't come,' but I think we can say though, that we hope you have stressed the fact that they have not accepted and just hold that up for a few days for world inspection.

RMC: Well I think that is right. That we can do and when he is here, I think that we can assume or expect him to act in a way that won't cause controversy inside the country. I think it would be wrong, Mr. President, either to try to or give him any reason to believe that you tried to keep him out of here.

LBJ: Well , I think-Well, you cannot keep him out of here. Nobody wants to keep him out of here. I don't think that is the point I want to make. But I do think the point ought to be made to

him that if his mission can't be successful, and he can't get the others here and he ought to make that point well and long and he ought to consider whether any good is going to be served by his traveling, in light of the fact they will not see him. Okay.

RMC: Thanks